

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PANAMA 5381

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TAGS: PINT PN

SUBJ: TORRIJOS ADDRESSES FEP CONGRESS

REF: PANAMA 5219

SUMMARY. IN SPEECH BEFORE STUDENT CONGRESS TORRIJOS PRAISED STUDENTS' ROLE IN PANAMANIAN REVOLUTION AND TOLD THEM GOP COULD NOT HAVE ADVANCED NOR COULD IT ADVANCE HAD IT ACTED CONTRARY TO STUDENT OPINION. HE CITED HIS MEMBERSHIP IN STUDENT ORGANIZATION AS THE AFFILIATION OF WHICH HE WAS MOST PROUD. HIS SPEECH REAFFIRMED HIS VIEW OF STUDENTS AS "CONSCIENCE" OF THE REVOLUTION AND REFLECTED HIS PERCEIVED NEED FOR CONTINUING STUDENT SUPPORT. DESPITE THIS, TORRIJOS' APPEARANCE WAS INTERRUPTED BY A WALKOUT OF 175-200 STUDENTS, MOST OF WHOM WERE MEMBERS OF FRENTE ESTUDIANTIL REVOLUCIONARIO (FER) FROM THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE. END SUMMARY.

1. GENERAL OMAR TORRIJOS HAVE INAUGURAL ADDRESS AT OPENING DAY OF 9TH FEDERATION OF PANAMANIAN STUDENTS (FEP) CONGRESS SEPTEMBER 5. BEFORE AN AUDIENCE OF APPROXIMATELY 8,000 STUDENTS AND GUESTS TORRIJOS EXPRESSED HIS PRIDE IN THE STUDENT MOVEMENT AND HIS GRATITUDE FOR THEIR "HONEST AND SINCERE" SUPPORT. HE ADDED THAT THE GOVERNMENT COULD NOT HAVE ADVANCED TO THE POINT IT HAS NOR COULD IT CONTINUE TO ADVANCE "IF IT THOUGHT OR ACTED IN DISACCORD WITH STUDENT OPINION." HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT HE IS CONFIDENTIAL

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ABOVE ALL PROUD TO HAVE ONCE BEEN A MEMBER OF THE FEP, WHICH HE

CONSIDERS "THE GREATEST SOURCE OF PATRIOTIC CONSCIOUSNESS WITH WHICH TO NURTURE PRESENT AND FUTURE LEADERS OF PANAMA. I WAS PRIVILEGED TO BELONG TO THIS SCHOOL OF SACRIFICE, BUT NOW I AM PRIVILEGED IN THAT I CAN THINK IN THE SAME MANNER, AND UNDERSTAND STUDENT MOVEMENTS." HE URGED THE STUDENTS NOT TO ACCEPT GIVEN TRUTHS BUT TO SEARCH FOR AND DISCUSS THE TRUTH "WHICH IS PRECISELY WHAT WE NEED IN ORDER TO BRING ABOUT THIS PROCESS WE ARE DEVELOPING." ACCOMPANYING TORRIJOS TO THE INAUGURAL WERE ARISTIDES ROYO, MINISTER OF EDUCATION, HUGO GUIRAUD, VICE MINISTER OF EDUCATION, ROMULO ESCOBAR BETHANCOURT, RECTOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF PANAMA, ADOLFO AHUMADO, LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION, ROBERTO DIAZ, SECRETARY GENERAL OF NATIONAL GUARD, EMETERIO MILLER, PRESIDENT NATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR DIGNITY, AND EDUARDO BERBEY, DIRECTOR OF STUDENT AFFAIRS-MINISTRY OF EDUCATION.

2. ALTHOUGH IT WAS NOT REPORTED IN THE MEDIA, TORRIJOS WAS FORCED TO CUT SHORT HIS SPEECH WHEN 175-200 STUDENTS INTERRUPTED HIM WITH BOOS AND SUBSEQUENTLY WALKED OUT. MOST OF STUDENTS INVOLVED IN WALKOUT WERE REPORTEDLY MEMBERS OF FRENTE ESTUDIANTIL REVOLUCIONARIO (FER) FROM THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE, THE SAME GROUP THAT STAGED THE AUGUST 14 DEMONSTRATION AT THE EMBASSY.

3. OUTGOING PRESIDENT OF FEP, ROMULO BETHANCOURT, SPOKE FOLLOWING TORRIJOS' ADDRESS. HE COMMENTED ON THE DEMOCRATIC AND REPRESENTATIVE NATURE OF THE MEETING AND NOTED THAT THE PRESENCE OF GENERAL TORRIJOS AND HIS DELEGATION WAS EVIDENCE OF THE RESPECT AND IMPORTANCE GIVEN BY GOP TO STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN NATIONAL AFFAIRS.

4. JESUS REYES, A CUBAN STUDENT AND PRESIDENT OF THE CONTINENTAL ORGANIZATION OF LATIN AMERICAN STUDENTS, SPEAKING FOR ALL INTERNATIONAL VISITORS AT THE CONGRESS, EXPRESSED THEIR DESIRE TO "REAFFIRM THEIR SOLIDARITY WITH THE PEOPLE AND GOVERNMENT OF PANAMA IN THEIR FIGHT FOR SOVEREIGNTY." HE ADDED THAT THE PANAMA CANAL HAS BEEN A PART OF THE "BLACK HISTORY OF INTERVENTION AND AGGRESSION THAT THE U.S. HAS PRACTICED IN LATIN AMERICA FOR MORE THAN HALF A CENTURY," AND THAT THE TREATY OF 1903 IS AN "OFFENSE" TO THE PEOPLE OF PANAMA AND THE REST OF THE WORLD.

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5. COMMENT. TORRIJOS' REMARKS TO FEP CONGRESS ARE CONSISTENT WITH HIS OFT-REPEATED REGARD FOR STUDENTS AS THE "CONSCIENCE" OF THE PANAMANIAN REVOLUTION. TORRIJOS IS PROUD OF FACT THAT DURING PAST FIVE YEARS HE HAS NOT HAD CLASHES BETWEEN THE NATIONAL GUARD AND STUDENTS. TORRIJOS HAS SOUGHT STUDENT SUPPORT AS PART OF HIS EFFORT TO KEEP UNBLEMISHED THE GOP'S REVOLUTIONARY IMAGE AND MAINTAIN SOCIAL PEACE. DURING RECENT MONTHS SOME STUDENT GROUPS, SUCH AS FER, HAVE BECOME CRITICAL OF TORRIJOS AND WE SUSPECT THE

DISTURBANCE OF HIS SPEECH WAS PREPLANNED. THE FACT THAT HE DID
NOT CASTIGATE THE U.S. MIGHT HAVE BEEN A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR.
END COMMENT.
JORDEN

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